



Section for typical Washington avenue by Montgomery Meigs, c. 1875



New Hampshire Avenue NW with trees planted approximately 20 feet on center



Shaded sidewalk near the southeast corner of the U.S. Capitol grounds

Urban Design Characteristics for South Capitol Street West of the Anacostia River

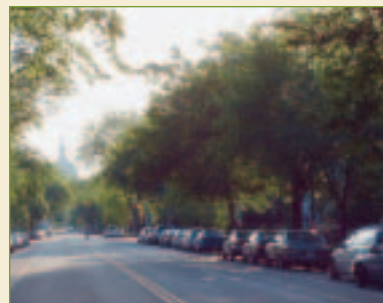
- A continuous, at-grade 130-foot street section as originally specified in the L'Enfant Plan with a narrow median and generous sidewalks
- Several at-grade intersections with traffic signals provide optimal connection and safe travel to and from adjoining cross streets
- Six lanes of moving traffic that maintain current corridor capacity, particularly during peak periods
- On-street parking during off-peak times to buffer sidewalks from moving traffic and to serve businesses along the corridor
- User-friendly signs/direction to nearby transit: buses, light rail, and Metro
- Bicycle pathways, and/or lanes, either on South Capitol Street or on a street to the east or west, connecting to regional networks
- Double rows of mighty trees with broad canopies to beautify the street, provide shade, and connect the street to parks and the Anacostia Riverwalk
- Street furniture—such as benches, waste baskets, and bicycle racks—of the highest quality

Establishing a grand boulevard along South Capitol Street's 130-foot street section is the major action from which other design decisions can be made. NCPC's *South Capitol Street Urban Design Study* evaluated three urban design scenarios that could each accommodate a grand boulevard with varying configurations of open space to define a distinguished right-of-way and public realm. This study also considered these options.

After careful analysis and consideration, this study has concluded that a six-lane boulevard within a 130-foot street section is the optimal street section for South Capitol Street because it satisfies the greatest number of transportation objectives and allows for the greatest number of urban design alternatives. This configuration restores the street's original spatial character and reinforces the axial relationship with the Capitol dome. Re-introduction of this boulevard, which was originally specified by the L'Enfant Plan, is the most historically appropriate. All three scenarios included in the NCPC study could accommodate this proposed boulevard.

Of the various roadway options that were considered, the six-lane boulevard balances multimodal traffic most effectively. Six lanes of vehicular traffic maintain South Capitol Street's current capacity but also allow pedestrians and cyclists to cross the street at signalized intersections with ease.

The design of the roadway and the accompanying public space is critically important to creating an inviting physical environment. Washington is filled with streets that are known for the spaces they create, and they are among Washington's most beautiful and cherished public areas.



East Capitol Street looking west toward the U.S. Capitol Dome



Louisiana Avenue NW looking toward Union Station



Virginia and Massachusetts Avenues—named after the most prominent of the original thirteen colonies—are the only two thoroughfares in Washington that extend through three of its four quadrants. While Massachusetts Avenue has largely retained its original configuration, Virginia Avenue was obscured over a century ago when railroad tracks were built along its alignment. The freeway constructed a hundred years later followed the same right-of-way. Today, aside from a few blocks in the city’s northwest quadrant, Virginia Avenue exists only in fragments, largely as frontage roads to I-395.

The restoration of Virginia Avenue in Southeast could be made possible by constructing a tunnel to carry regional through traffic beneath the South Capitol Street corridor and removing the Southeast Freeway. Replacing the 300-foot wide highway with Virginia Avenue’s original 160-foot right-of-way creates new opportunities for public spaces and private development. The restoration of Virginia Avenue would accomplish far more than restoring the view of the Capitol dome; it would capture the value of the land currently consumed by highway infrastructure.

Virginia Avenue is one of several locations considered for roundabouts along South Capitol Street. Although it looks like Washington’s other traffic circles, the roundabout can safely handle South Capitol Street’s existing traffic volumes. According to the report *Roundabouts: An Informational Guide* published by the U.S. Department of Transportation, roundabouts can safely handle existing high traffic volumes but would limit pedestrian access because traffic would flow continuously.

Virginia Avenue



Virginia Avenue and a proposed roundabout at the intersection of South Capitol Street

Although roundabouts do not have signalized intersections like most of Washington's circles, they have the potential to become magnets of urban activity at any hour of the day or night. Washington's best circles attract urban activity that gives each place a life of its own. While a roundabout handles traffic differently than a traditional Washington circle, it can be visually consistent with the city's other circles.



Aerial view of Dupont Circle looking east up P Street NW



Dupont Circle looking northwest from Connecticut Avenue NW



Dupont Circle: a magnet of urban activity



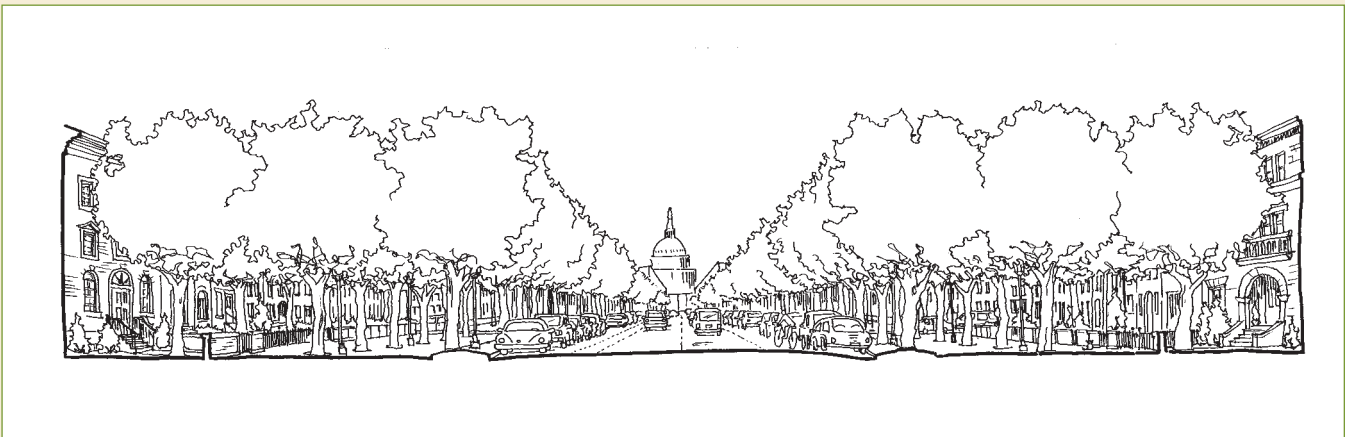
New Jersey Avenue's role in the nation's capital is changing. Redevelopment of the Southeast Federal Center will bring more traffic. Along New Jersey Avenue, new mixed-use development will add residences, commercial establishments, and vitality to now-empty blocks.

New Jersey Avenue should be remade to accommodate these changes. Additional travel between the Capitol and the Southeast Federal Center will require improved roadway, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian connections. New landscaping and street furniture are needed to create an appropriate setting for the avenue's mixed-use development.

The avenue's 160-foot-wide street section offers ample space for the needed changes. A four-lane roadway, rebuilt and repaved, would provide for vehicular traffic. Broad sidewalks will front the new buildings. Landscaping, including three rows of trees on each side of the avenue, will provide a green setting and frame the view of the Capitol dome.

Because of its width and location, New Jersey Avenue may provide a location for a new transit circulator between the Capitol and the Southeast Federal Center that could connect to other new transit links in the District. Planning for light rail and other new transit systems should address New Jersey Avenue's place in those systems.

New Jersey Avenue SE



Cross section of improved New Jersey Avenue, SE



Van Street SE

This street, which has a 50-foot right-of-way, is typical of the thoroughfares in L'Enfant's perpendicular grid. Its current disconnection from the street network is typical of the side streets throughout the South Capitol Street corridor. As the *South Capitol Street Urban Design Study* demonstrates, the blocks between South Capitol and Van Streets provide numerous opportunities for parks and squares. It would also create even more places for future monuments and memorials within the study area than the eight sites defined by NCPC's *Monuments and Museums Master Plan*.

Half Street SE

Half Street is one thoroughfare east of South Capitol Street that could accommodate a transit line. The District Department of Transportation has recently begun an Alternatives Analysis and Environmental Study that will determine the most appropriate alignment for light rail or any other form of rail transit along the corridor and throughout the city.

Although dedicated transit lanes were considered for South Capitol Street, including them and maintaining current vehicular capacity would require the street to be widened significantly. This would make South Capitol Street more difficult to use for pedestrians and bicyclists. The increased width would also divide rather than unify local neighborhoods.

Van Street SE / Half Street SE



Perspective of Half Street SE with dedicated transit lanes

Half Street's 80-foot right-of-way can accommodate two dedicated light rail lanes, two vehicular lanes, and possibly two bicycle lanes. It is an ideal location for a transit center because of its proximity to the Navy Yard Metrorail station and local bus lines, which would allow passengers to transfer among buses, light rail, and Metrorail.

The existing Metrobus garage at M Street provides the opportunity for an intermodal center. The Metrobus maintenance function will be relocated.



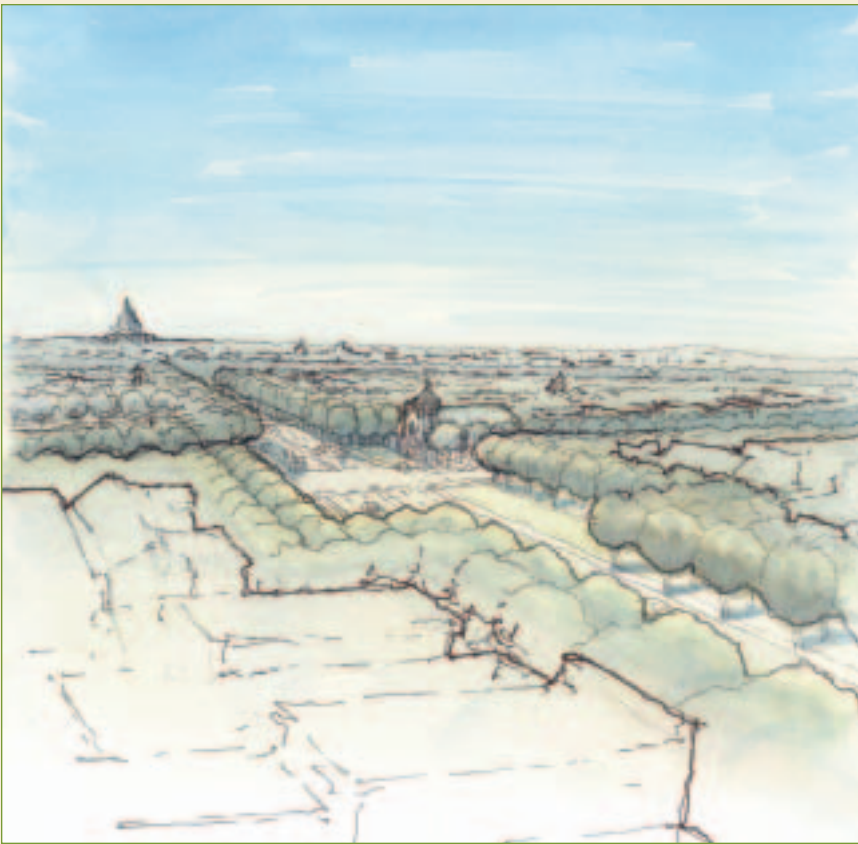
John Paul Jones Memorial on a small triangular green space southwest of the Washington Monument



Proposed improvements to the intersection of M and South Capitol Streets include reconfiguring the underpass arrangement into a signalized, at-grade intersection. This is essential to reestablishing South Capitol Street's identity as an urban boulevard. It will also provide a more dignified setting for the St. Vincent de Paul Church, one of the corridor's historic and cultural resources.

An at-grade intersection can handle existing traffic volumes at this intersection because the boulevard will provide six lanes for through traffic compared to the four lanes in the present underpass. The volume of turning traffic at this intersection will be reduced by the creation of new intersections at Potomac Avenue and at other cross streets along South Capitol Street. M Street will no longer be the only location where turns are possible.

Intersection of M and South Capitol Streets



Perspective of M and South Capitol Streets looking northeast



Potomac Avenue (initially named Georgia Avenue) originally ran from southwest Washington to Congressional Cemetery along the west bank of the Anacostia River. Its interruption by the Navy Yard and its discontinuation west of South Capitol Street have left only fragments of the original avenue intact.

The proposed improvements to Potomac Avenue include its extension to 2nd Street SE on the east and to Fort McNair on the west. Introducing a proper urban street into an area where none exists will spur economic development along the avenue's entire length, one of the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative's objectives for this area.

A circle for the intersection of Potomac Avenue and South Capitol Street could create a public place that will attract visitors and provide a grand setting for a future monument or memorial. It would provide continuity along South Capitol Street and coincide with other District circles in scale and form but limit pedestrian access.

East of the Anacostia River, the local street system needs to be better integrated and separated from the arterial system. The interstate infrastructure should be confined to I-295 and its interchange with the Suitland Parkway. This will have the benefit of reinstating South Capitol Street's urban identity. The park-like character of Suitland Parkway should be extended north of the I-295 interchange through Poplar Point and to the new bridge. This work would be fully integrated with improvements at Poplar Point and the Anacostia Riverwalk, which will be fully developed in subsequent studies.

Potomac Avenue SE & SW / Improvements at Suitland Parkway and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard



Perspective of roundabout at the intersection of Potomac Avenue and South Capitol Street looking southwest

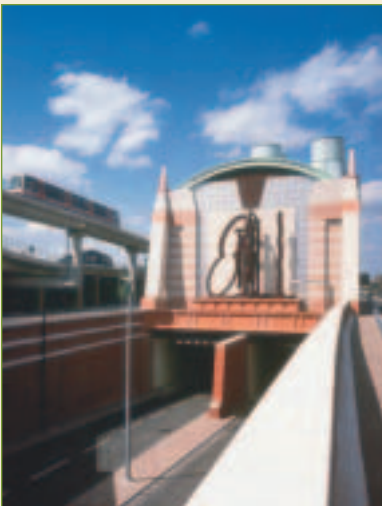


A tunnel under the South Capitol Street corridor would provide a new link in the transportation network with many benefits. Much of the traffic now on South Capitol Street consists of trips through the corridor, not to it. A tunnel between I-295 east of the Anacostia River and the existing I-395 Third Street tunnel would carry trips bound for downtown Washington and beyond, removing that traffic from the surface streets.

Constructing a tunnel to carry through traffic will alleviate congestion on South Capitol Street. This will be essential for South Capitol Street's transformation into the centerpiece of a pleasant and livable neighborhood. The tunnel would alleviate the burden of commuter traffic on the entire street network. Including a tunnel in the study area's improvements is the only scenario that permits the added benefit of removing the Southeast Freeway.

The tunnel portals are a critical part of the study area's urban design considerations and can be configured in many different ways. East of the river, their design must respect the Poplar Point parkland and Anacostia's historic neighborhoods. The north end of the tunnel, which connects to I-395 and the center leg tunnel, should be linked with the existing interstate system without adversely impacting the area southwest of the U.S. Capitol grounds.

The Tunnel



Limehouse Link tunnel portal in London, England



Sketch of a tunnel portal on the east/west side of the Anacostia River

Creating a South Capitol Gateway will require a comprehensive program of transportation improvements that an appropriate entrance to Washington's Monumental Core and complement the neighborhoods, parklands, and cultural facilities envisioned by the Anacostia Waterfront Initiative. The South Capitol Corridor provides the setting for dramatic change to better serve residents of the District and the region as well as visitors to the nation's capital.

A new South Capitol Street boulevard with wide sidewalks and intersections at cross streets can serve both vehicular traffic and pedestrians, creating a pleasant precinct that reconnects the adjacent neighborhoods and encourages economic redevelopment. A Zone of Improvement can define the public realm east of the boulevard to become a new locus of memorials, museums, and public open space as well as contribute to the corridor's transportation effectiveness.

A new Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge can forge better links across the Anacostia River and become a significant aesthetic and symbolic element of Washington's Monumental Core. Including pedestrian, bicycle, and transit in the bridge's design will create better connections through and between the neighborhoods and parklands along the river.

The Gateway Summary

A tunnel beneath the Anacostia River for through traffic could create far-reaching opportunities for even greater change, including a notable decrease in traffic on the corridor's surface streets and the removal of the Southeast Freeway.

Emphasizing transit investment as a central component of transportation system improvement would ensure that the corridor continues to be an appropriate gateway, even as the region grows and travel increases.

Replacing the present transportation facilities would ensure that the corridor continues to provide the accessibility required for the region's and nation's security.

All these changes could be accomplished in ways that are fitting to Washington's unique character, respecting its history and innovating for the future. The boulevard can be designed to be consistent with Washington's other great streets and avenues; its connections to other streets will reestablish the dominance of the L'Enfant Plan in the corridor. The new bridge can be an exciting structure that expresses the civic aspirations of the nation's capital.

